

Background

It is widely recognized that following a major disaster, first responders will not be able to meet the demand for services. The number of victims, communication failures, and road blockages are all factors that may impact the public's ability to access the emergency services that they have come to expect at a moment's notice by calling 911. People will have to rely on each other to assist in saving and sustaining lives.

Previous disasters have demonstrated that family members, neighbors and fellow employees will spontaneously try to help each other. Following the Mexico City earthquake, untrained, spontaneous volunteers saved 800 people. However, 100 people lost their lives while attempting to save others. This is a high price to pay for offering help that is preventable.

In recognition of the need to prepare the public, the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Emergency Management Institute (EMI) and the National Fire Academy adopted and expanded the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) concept and materials developed by the Los Angeles City Fire Department to be applicable to all disasters. CERT is about readiness, people helping people, rescuer safety, and doing the greatest good for the greatest number.

Today CERTs have been set up throughout the country. All CERT members participate in trainings that include disaster preparedness; disaster fire suppression; disaster medical operations; light search and rescue operations; and disaster psychology and team organization.

At the time of this publication, Pandemic H1N1 influenza was not included as part of the CERT training's disaster medical operations. Although there are many pandemic influenza resources available, there is little guidance and best practices for CERT trainers to use in developing CERT pandemic influenza curriculums.

It is well recognized that staffing resources will be limited during a pandemic. Public health agencies and cities will have to rely heavily on trained volunteers to assist with various functions that cannot be completed by their own workforce due to other demands and to illness.

Disaster experience indicates that during a pandemic influenza community volunteers will step forward spontaneously to help. The characteristics of a pandemic influenza make it imperative that these volunteers be prepared and receive proper training beforehand. *The CERT Pandemic H1N1 Influenza Train-the-Trainer Toolkit* will make this needed training available to CERTs.